DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 048 896 LI 002 697

TITLE	Books by Mail.
INSTITUTION	San Antonio Public Library, Tex.
SPONS AGENCY	Council on Library Resources, Inc., Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	70
NOTE	15p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Information Needs, *Library Circulation, *Library Programs, *Library Services, Special Services
IDENTIFIERS	*Books by Mail Program

ABSTRACT

Books ordered by phone and delivered by mail is the new service offered to library users by the San Antonio Public Library System. Requests sent in by letter are also honored, although activity of this type is negligible. The program is designed to update library service, to better serve the shut-in, and to reach those who are not now regular library users. Book loans through the mail average approximately one percent of all loans made--24,000 annually from a total of over 2,100,000 loans. The average cost per book, based on long range calculations, is 16.5 cents. (MF)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

BOOKS BY MAIL

ED048896

An Experimental Project Sponsored By The Council On Library Resources

SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARY
LI 002 692

Hopefully this report will help you to evaluate for yourself whether or not a similar Books by Mail Program may have application for your library system.

Our staff will welcome the opportunity to provide any additional information that you may request on this matter and we will also share our plans and specifications for the mailing center

SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARY

SAN ANTONIO 5, TEXAS

November 1, 1970

Dr. Fred C. Cole, President
Council on Library Resources, Inc.
One Dupont Circle, N.W. Suite 620
Washington, D. C. 20036

In Re: CLR 415 - Books By Mail

Dear Dr. Cole:

You and your associates have sponsored through the San Antonio Public Library Books by Mail Project an experimental program that may become the library activity sleeper of the 70's. This project is recommended for metropolitan libraries throughout the Nation.

Presented in this the final report on the San Antonio Project is information to substantiate the future prospects for any Books by Mail activity. Results obtained from our efforts have been evaluated completely and the analysis is virtually all positive.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the San Antonio Public Library System and for the citizens of San Antonio, I am pleased to express our deep appreciation for your Group's faith and financial backing for this experimental effort. During the past ten months the program has been carried as a regular part of the San Antonio Public Library's operating budget and this expenditure of city funds is easily justified to the complete satisfaction of all parties concerned.

Sincerely,

Irwin Sexton, Library Director

IS/vlb

HIGHLIGHTS

- Book loans through the mail average approximately one percent of all loans made in the San Antonio Public Library System - 24,000 annually from a total of over 2,200,000 loans.

- Phone service takes equal or less time than comparable walk-in service.

- On time return of mailed material is better than returns from walk-in patrons.

- Cost of mail service is economically feasible and practical.

- Space requirements for working area, equipment and supplies can be fitted realistically into less than ninety square feet of floor space.

- Public relations values are significantly meaningful on many different levels.

- Service is especially appreciated by homebound individuals.

- Program requires no special staff or separate book stock.

- Wear and tear on mailed materials is no greater than from walk-in loans.

- Staff like the service - it tends to simplify situations that could become problems.

BOOKS BY MAIL

Franklin Roosevelt captured the imagination of the American public with his statement "We have nothing to fear but fear itself". Anxiety probably was the one greatest factor that kept the San Antonio Public Library from offering the Books by Mail Program ten years ago. Chances are fairly good that fear or anxiety is keeping hundreds of other libraries from offering it now.

All individuals involved in the use of public funds find that reticence and caution are highly desirable traits in numerous budget situations, for without specifics for justification there exists no real base upon which to substantiate a request for funds. It is in this frame of reference that the San Antonio project was undertaken with outside support. Tight money and tight budgets are only two of the reasons or excuses for not testing more. Change and progress in the library world has really developed very little in the past twenty years. Progress has been made but the bulk of it fits neatly into the same old cubby holes - and admittedly, Books by Mail also falls into that category. Books by Mail is not new nor is it particularly unique. Thus, one could logically say - Why waste time in re-examining it. The answer can best be made in three parts:

(1) There is a real and valid need for home delivery of books to at least a select segment in a given service area.

(2) Cost of the service is fully in line with all other standard library service. Thus, perhaps a home delivery program of books needs to be accepted as a standard part of the public library program.

(3) Public relations values are exceptionally great and they alone can fully justify any and all costs for the service.

Realistically the mailing of or the offer to mail books can greatly simplify the life of the librarian. Telephone requests for information can save time for the library staff and the individual making the request. Once the requested material has been checked to answer the phone inquiry, the material can quickly and easily be readied for mailing. Material owned by the library but not on the shelves when requested can likewise be prepared for mailing when it becomes available. This service holds for both phone and walk-in library users.

Staff reaction to the Books by Mail program has generally been in complete support of the experiment. Although some staff feel the

program tends to pamper the library user and others have expressed an interest in going even further. Specifically staff suggestions have included elimination of library fines, free inter library loan, and substituting the library books by mail funds to improve salaries instead of extending service. Some citizens have resented the books by mail service, suggesting that the money be used for security guards or simply for more books. They vocalize concern that luxury service is unrealistic for any but the wealthiest of areas. The citizens were answered by noting that sponsorship of the San Antonio project came from the Council on Library Resources, and that no local funds were involved. This satisfied the citizen during the experimental period and the question has not been raised since the program has become a part of the Library's regular operating budget. The Library Board and the Library Administrative Staff feel confident, however, that the service can be fully and realistically justified for the individual citizen who feels the service is a luxury.

During the San Antonio experiment an 87 year old lady attended a Friends of the Library meeting solely to say thank you to someone for making this wonderful mailing of books possible. She said getting around at her age is difficult and the convenience of Books by Mail has given her tremendous personal satisfaction with virtually no effort. Mothers with small children report that they can keep good reading materials in their homes through the Books by Mail program and whenever possible they use the library in person. Businessmen phone, or have their secretaries phone, for material to help solve problems and to keep them current; or to keep pace with the complex and intricate political climate. At least one businessman uses the Books by Mail service to have good reading material available to take along on plane trips. Jail inmates can also use the service but this, because of technicalities, was not possible in San Antonio. San Antonio's chief jailer was concerned about the possibility of using hard bound books to smuggle narcotics, razor blades and even hack saw blades into the jail. Although at first this concern seemed far out, upon examination it appeared to have some merit. A skillful confederate could conceivably lift the end papers of a book to conceal any of the aforementioned items, and neatly replace the end papers. Detection could be virtually impossible. One of the very first mail requests in San Antonio came by letter from an inmate of the Bexar County Jail and with considerable reluctance he was turned down. The San Antonio City Council, along with other groups, is however striving to find a way to provide library service for individuals who are confined to the City-County Jail. One man in full traction for

weeks found friends came to visit less and less as the weeks passed. He, therefore, used his time by reading more and more books that were acquired by the Books by Mail program. He also enjoyed the phone conversations about books but never did he in any way abuse the privilege. San Antonio's citizens have been quite vocal in praising the books by phone program, but they admittedly prefer to use the library in person. The project provides a back up service that has become meaningful to many residents throughout the area.

One very young teenage boy says that the Books by Mail program is just great. He is an avid reader, too young to drive, his father is dead and his mother works: Round trip bus fare to the Main Library is sixty cents. He knows what he wants and to date the mail service has fully met his reading requirements. Each day's mailing is entirely different from the preceding day's request. The diversification of interest is truly reflected in each mail sack of books. (Children's books 22%, Adult non-fiction 47%, Adult Fiction 31%)

COST

The cost, based on long range calculations, shows the average per book is 16.5 cents. This includes bag cost, postage, label, pick up and check out of the book, packaging time, delivery to post office, telephone answering service and a miscellaneous expense figure of 10% for overhead. It does not include professional staff time. Justification for excluding the professional staff time is perhaps one of the weakest parts of the San Antonio evaluation. Some members of the advisory committee felt that this figure must necessarily be included but since the overall use of Books by Mail has been included with the statistics for the Main Library the figure simply reflects a supplemental cost for the Main Library service operation.

MAILING COSTS

Average postage costs for mailing of books drops as the number of books per package is increased. Based on San Antonio's experience the average costs per book are as follows: 1 book 7 cents; 2 books 4 1/2 cents; 3 books 3 2/3 cents; 4 books 3 1/4 cents and 5 books 3 2/5 cents. In a like manner the cost of jiffy bags on a per book basis drops by the same general ratio. San Antonio uses sizes 3, 5, 6 and 7 jiffy bags. Bag cost per book are 1, 5¢; 2, 3 1/2¢; 3, 2 1/2¢; 4, 2¢; 5, 2¢.

CRITICISM, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

One individual who received a requested delivery of Books by Mail refused to accept it because a friend had already loaned him the books. The Library in this instance was responsible for postage both ways.

Excellent program - but what will it do to the Post Office?

Wonderful service - especially since parking is so bad.

A patron would like, if we discontinue mail service, to make a deposit and pay to have books sent.

A student from Lee High School read about the program in his school paper and was requesting two books - to help our program.

Books on grammar and fractions were requested by policeman's wife who read about books by mail in "Accent", a City Hall publication.

Woman, sick in bed, thinks the service is wonderful.

Mother called because wrong book sent to child.

Angry woman - book sent to her had not arrived. Could not understand delay.

Staff have encountered very favorable responses by offering to mail material that has been inquired about by phone. Many residents of San Antonio and Bexar County unfortunately are not aware of the service and the response to the offer of mailing material is invariably greeted with amazement and delight.

During a three week bus strike use of books by mail doubled in San Antonio. Nursing homes in general were a disappointment for most of the workers did not want to encourage use of the mail service for return of materials could involve them, and most thought they already had enough work.

PROBLEM AREAS

In the initial phase of the activity the library apparently reached many individuals who had never before used the library system. This was evidenced by an exceptionally low return rate. Over 50% of the books mailed out in the first month did not come back on time. The situation concerned the administrators of the project but it was quickly and easily solved by including within each package of books a leaflet outlining procedures for renewing books by phone and stress was placed upon the need for prompt return of all materials. With the leaflet enclosed the return problem became insignificant. In fact today in the San Antonio Public Library System, books by mail are returned more promptly than any other type of loan that is made by the Library System.

STUDENT USE OF THE SERVICES

Student use of libraries in any form can and does produce difficult problems. There appeared to be a potential problem in the Books by Mail service for virtually all of the 67,000 students of elementary and high schools in the San Antonio Metropolitan Area might want to do their homework assignments simply by calling the library. This fear fortunately did not materialize despite the fact that a concerted effort was made in one large high school to encourage students to use the Books by Mail service. Library staff concluded that student assignments are either due within a day or two or they are required in three to six weeks. An assignment due in one or two days could not be handled through the Books by Mail program and most students appeared to want to use the library in person for the long term assignments or they put off the work until it was too late to request material by mail.

The Post Office has delayed service by returning the unopened mail sacks of packaged books. This has happened on three distinct and separate occasions but it has not happened in over nine months. There are, however, times when individual borrowers report that a book has taken ten days to two weeks to reach them. This type of complaint is seldom presented, averaging no more than four or five per six month period. When a situation of this type arises the library staff takes the borrowers word.

GRANT

The Council on Library Resources provided a grant of $22,500.00 for experimentation of the Books by Mail project in a metropolitan area. However, total expenditures over a two year period total $13,200.; salaries and employee benefits amounted to $5,312; Travel $2,682; Supplies and materials $1,664; Telephone $292; Postage $1,906 and Equipment $1,384. Over 48,000 books were loaned during the two year experimental period for slightly less than 30 cents per volume. The experiment, however, invloved costs that would not normally be reflected in this kind of a program. Thus, the 30 cent figure is valid only for the experimental state.

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The National Advisory Committee, consisting of Mr. Robert T. Jordan, Federal City College, Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Shelahbell Gragin, El Paso Public Library, El Paso, Texas; Mr. John F. Anderson,

San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, California; Mrs. Susanna Alexander, State Library, Jefferson City, Missouri; Mr. Foster Mohrhardt, Council on Library Resources, Inc., Washington, D. C.; Mr. Hardin Lynch, Wenatchee, Washington. The Committee met seven different times and the members of the committee were consulted on a regular basis. Their comments, suggestions, criticisms were very valuable in both the guidance and the evaluation of the program.

ITEMS THAT HAVE BEEN EXCLUDED FROM MAILING

Exclusions include phonograph records, films and reference material that do not normally circulate. All other items are regularly available. The library has, however, not been able to offer free copy service and no arrangements have been made to date to provide this service even with a small fee.

POSTAGE

Various methods of packaging were either tested and/or investigated. The self-sealing padded bag initially appeared to have some outstanding advantages but this was available only in corrugated form and it worked successfully in this experiment only for the packaging of one relatively small book. This one type of bag did not hold up in those instances where large books or serveral books were being sent at one time. The American Library Association's Technology Program Director was consulted on packaging and he concurred that bagging was by far the fastest and simplest method of packaging. His concern was, however, related to an early report from his organization wherein padded bags were reported to show excessive damage to those materials that were being sent in them. The alternate, however, of using the special mailing cases proved to be unsatisfactory for the San Antonio activity. Storage of the fiberboard cases presented a sizeable problem. The additional weight tended to increase the mailing costs. The cases would necessarily have to be charged out just the same as a book and this would add to the overall cost. The time required for placing the books in the carton, fastening the straps both inside and outside the case again added costs to make the use of the fiberboard boxes very impractical. The jiffy bag with the zip opening ultimately proved to be the most suitable method of packaging for this project. Closing of the bags was greatly simplified by the use of an electric stapler - one that used heavy duty staples and was triggered automatically as the bag was pushed into the stapling machine.

EQUIPMENT

Equipment requirements can vary considerably with cost from a $25 postage scale to a $750 percision scale. Under some types of situations an ordinary desk stapler is adequate to close the book bags and the cost of this item can be well under $5. A heavy duty stapler (Staplex Company) electrically operated can cost about $150. The postage meter is convenient but roll or sheet stamps can be used to eliminate the meter charge and the postage meter cost. Any ordinary desk or table can serve as a base of operation but a specifically designed and constructed unit for the books by mail set up can cost close to $400. The framework to hold postage bags open can be constructed for less than $10 but a manufactured mail sack holder (Pitney-Bowes) for two bags with a quick release will cost between $50 and $75. The San Antonio project utilized quality equipment throughout and work simplification techniques and procedures were utilized in the design and construction of the work station. Even with experimental procedures the total equipment cost was under $1,400. The program can, however, be initiated with an equipment cost of less than $100. Ultimately there may be developed an electronic postage scale that could be tied into the postage meter to weight and provide postage simultaneously. Bag closing could be simplified with gang type trigger stapler and automatic feeds could be provided to make book bags of all sizes instantaneously available. These refinements would not, however, materially affect the overall packaging cost for less than one minute would be saved through utilization of other equipment. A ceramic roller six inches wide was found to be ideally suited to moistening mailing labels. It is easy to clean, it is instantaneously ready for use and the wide roller completely moistens the label with one pass. The heavy base makes it virtually impossible to spill and it can be located immediately adjacent to the postage scale.

A foot operated box type stapler was used in the early experimental stages of the program. This piece of equipment was easy for male members of the staff to operate but some of the ladies found it cumbersome and difficult to manipulate. This instrument used a staple approximately 1 1/8" long and an 1/8" wide. It in effect permanently sealed the bags. One library borrower complained that the service was fine but it took her almost two hours to get the package open.

TELEPHONE ANSWERING SERVICE

Telephone answering service was initiated November 18, 1968 at a basic charge of $22.50 a month for 75 calls. Additional calls are charged for at the rate of 15¢ per call. Basic cost was increased one year later to $25.00 per month and the additional cost per call remained the same. Surprisingly enough, the answering service has been used very sparingly and at no time has the San Antonio service exceeded the basic 75 calls per month. On a per hour basis the cost of the answering service is 4¢ per hour for those hours when the library is not open. On the basis of the hourly charge service appears to be justified. The library is not charged except when a message is recorded for transmittal to the library. Numerous fringe benefits above and beyond the mail order service include advising library users as to when the library will again open, emergency messages concerning personnel are received and relayed. The Answering Service provides an ideal method for staff to quickly and easily relay to the library questions or requests for information from friends and relatives. Some staff have personally called the library number to request books for friends at one or two o'clock in the morning. While at a party invariably someone wants to know does the library have a particular book or material on a subject that is of interest to the individual. The telephone answering service is reliable whereas a note written on the back of an envelope or tucked away in a pocket can easily get lost. Overall the public relations value of the telephone answering system by itself appears to justify the 4¢ per hour expenditure.

FORMS

In the early stages of the experiment it was felt highly desirable to have multiple forms, complete with address label. Supplemental information would include listing of titles, authors, subjects, telephone number, date needed by, and date received. In practice, however, the need for relatively elaborate procedures for recording requests were not necessary. They simply provided information that was not used beyond the early experimental part of the program. As now operated, the San Antonio books by mail requests involve the completion of an address label and listing on a 3 x 5 card the specific books and/or subjects that are desired. Requests are normally filled within a matter of one or two hours after they are received and those that cannot be filled are handled in the same manner as reserve book requests. This minimizes paper work, simplifies the work of the staff and provides the library user with the needed materials. The only real

justification for more elaborate procedures is to analyze and/or study how the service is being used.

PUBLICITY

One of the recognized problems at the outset of the experimental work was securing and maintaining a relatively strong public relations program. Here the San Antonio project failed to achieve the desired volume of support from the mass media. The Books by Mail program does not readily lend itself to repeated newspaper stories. The San Antonio Public Library has managed to secure two or three articles in the three metropolitan newspapers and in virtually all of the suburban papers. Front page coverage introduced the program in two of the metropolitan papers and in three of the suburbian papers. Prime time on television newscasts was provided by all three of the TV stations and two of the stations gave a follow-up story. The human interest element, at least in theory, offered a real potential for regular, constant support - but this failed to materialize. On at least two occasions there have been letters to the editor in support of the Books by Mail program and several editorials appeared. Signs placed in each of the eight branch libraries, the main library and the six mobile libraries, are regularly replaced in bright colors to try and encourage use of the service, but relatively little response has been noted from this facet of promotion. Book marks have been available at each location since the inception of the program. Book marks briefly provide the library borrower with information concerning the service. One of the best outside support items promoting the service came from the City Public Service Board's coverage of the service in their monthly billing enclosure. This presented the service and how to use it in Steps 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. One of the metropolitan newspapers regularly lists selected new books that have been acquired by the Library System and the introductory paragraph to the list states books are available in the library and through Books by Mail. In other words, unlike regular interlibrary loan, new material and current information is available through the Books by Mail plan. Radio stations use numerous spot announcements in support of Books by Mail activity, but obviously the stations reject using basically the same spot announcements month in and month out. Thus, only references to the service can be made. For example, a book and/or a subject may be noted in spot announcements followed with a statement "This material is available through Books by Mail. Phone 223-6851". This reference, however, leaves many people in doubt for they inevitably feel that there will be

a charge made for this service. It is virtually impossible to include in the ordinary spot that a library card is not needed. When everything is included the spot has no place left for additional book information.

SOME COMPARISONS IN SERVICE

The San Antonio program offers books in every subject field. Virtually every circulating book is available for loan through the mail program, and experience has shown that library users in San Antonio and Bexar County have very diversified interests. Every day mail requests include a new variety of material. The programs offered elsewhere in the United States that incorporate a book catalog find inevitably over 99% of the requests for materials are confined to specific listings noted in the catalog. This is despite the fact that announcements made in the information section of the catalog note that any book and/or subject may be requested through the mail. The San Antonio project does not provide return postage whereas at least one of books by mail programs wherein the catalog is used does provide return postage. Wear and tear on books loaned through the San Antonio program is no more and no less than books loaned through ordinary circulation. However, paper back books that tend to dominate the library mail order programs wherein the catalog is used are returned in far better condition than when the same material is circulated over a desk. Perhaps part of the explanation lies in the fact that the paper back books are mailed in heavy mailing bags and they are returned in the same way. The book therefore is always protected. Mailing of paper backed books has some distinct advantages in that the bag itself is lighter weight and less costly. The weight of the paper back book is also considerably less (one-half or less) that the weight of the hard bound books. Overall the San Antonio evaluation concludes that use of the catalog definitely tends to restrict the reader to making selections from those items that are described in the published list. Perhaps this obstacle can be overcome, but at this writing this did appear to be a major problem. The San Antonio project rejected publication of a book catalog on the basis of cost. Preparation, publication and distribution of a book catalog in an area serving 800,000 residents would be impractical and unrealistic. This decision was something other than totally acceptable to the National Advisory Committee where there was at least one dissenting vote.

The use of the Books by Mail program where the printed book catalog is used varies considerably. Immediately following publication

of the catalog the use is relatively high. That is, approximately 7,000 book loans a month. Within six months, however, the requests dropped to one third of that amount. With the publication of a new catalog the interest again rises and immediately starts to taper off. Obviously some households keep the catalog and use it on a regular basis whereas others make a one time use of it. In San Antonio the evaluation recognizes that greater use would be made of books by mail service if a printed catalog were available, but cost, even at five or six cents per copy, could not be justified within the scope of the San Antonio activity. In addition to the catalog's cost, there would necessarily have to be a very sizeable collection of paper back books to meet the need. This kind of program, however, does need to be tested. Perhaps some day a metropolitan library will pursue this activity. With 800,000 residents a minimum of at least 200,000 catalogs would be required to reach every household, and at 10¢ a copy, assuming two catalogs per year, the cost would be $20,000. The cost for providing paper back books, assuming approximately 3,000 entries in the two catalogs and 12 to 20 copies per book, would add another $80,000 to the program. The $100,000 expenditure might very well be worthwhile for in all probability the program of this type could produce reader interest that would produce loans well in excess of 12,000 per month. The United States Health, Education and Welfare, Library Research Division, expressed keen interest in the San Antonio Project and at one time they were interested in considering the possibility of participating in the financing of the activity. Additional financing, however, was not sought by the San Antonio Library for at that time there were too many unknown factors to realistically justify the need for additional money. Where the book catalog and the return request postcard is used, almost all of the borrowers fill out the complete card - that is they request eight books - no more, no less. In San Antonio requests for material averages 2 1/2 books per request. The Books by Mail program with the book catalog can inevitably be handled completely by clerical personnel; whereas, the San Antonio program requires in most instances the assistance of professionally trained staff. This, however, is not to be construed as a disadvantage for the San Antonio program was designed to very realistically provide the user with service comparable to walk-in service and the personal contract with the professional librarian aids materially in making this possible. No separate collection is designated for Books by Mail materials in the San Antonio Public Library, but the paper back books mail programs do keep a separate stock just for mailing.

ERIC User Please Note:

Articles from the San Antonio Light, the San Antonio News, the Sunday Light, The Northside Recorde, CPSB's Hi Lites, The San Antonio Express and the Wilson Library Bulletin which were included in the original document are omitted in this EDRS printing.